

Dies, dates, and other Lincoln lore

By Roger Boye

HERE ARE answers to several questions about funny-looking Lincoln cents.

Q — I'm told that some 1972 pennies are worth big money because of odd markings on the coins. Is that true, and if so, what should I look for? — D. T., Rock Falls

A — Check for doubled letters and numbers on the heads sides of 1972 cents minted in Philadelphia. By accident, government workers produced several thousand "doubled cents" in 1972; uncirculated specimens retail today for more than \$250.

Incidentally, the same mistake also was made at the Philadelphia Mint on thousands of Lincoln cents dated 1955. Those error coins in uncirculated condition fetch more than \$500 each.

Q — My son found a Lincoln penny with only three numbers in the date: "197." The coin is in mint condition, and the fourth number position has no trace of filing marks. Does it have any value? — M. L., Chicago

A — Coins are made when two "dies" (metal objects bearing the design of a coin) strike a "slug." As your coin was produced, parts of the heads-side "die" became filled with grease that kept the last number on the date from being formed.

A Lincoln cent from the 1970s with a "filled-die minting error" might retail for \$2 or less, said error-coin expert Alan Herbert. Such errors are relatively common, and, he warns, they can easily be faked.

Q — In the last two years, I've found three Lincoln cents that are unusually light in color, looking almost like silver. The dates are 1972, 1976, and 1979. What can you tell me about them? — P. S., Evanston

A — Most likely, someone treated your coins with a chemical that changed their color. Such doctored

coins have no collector value.

However, there is a slim chance that government workers goofed when they made one or more of your coins. For example, perhaps they made the coin out of a "slug" that was supposed to be used for a dime. Authentic "wrong metal" minting errors are major collector items.

Q — I'm in the habit of checking my coins for weird markings, missing letters, unusual mint marks, etc. Where can I get more information about such oddities? — T. F., Chicago

A — Buy a copy of "The Official Price Guide to Mint Errors and Varieties," by Alan Herbert, a basic hobby reference (\$3.95). The book is sold in some coin stores, or may be ordered from the publisher (House of Collectibles, 771 Kirkman Rd., Suite 100, Orlando, Fla. 32811).

Author Herbert invites hobbyists to write him (Box C, Deadwood, S.D. 57732) with their questions about error coins, but he asks that writers enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and allow a few weeks for a reply.

Also, the editor of the Collector Clearinghouse section of Coin World (a weekly newspaper) answers questions about error coins. The address is P.O. Box 150, Sidney, Ohio 45367.

Q — I think I have a rare Lincoln penny and would like to know how much it is worth. The coin includes drawings of the Liberty Bell and a map of the United States. — B. K., Skokie

A — Your question is the most often-asked query I receive. Once again, here's the answer.

Souvenir shop owners and other businessmen engrave designs into Lincoln cents in an attempt to create keepsakes. As far as collectors are concerned, such coins are worthless gimmicks made by people out for a fast buck.